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Imani Temple Vs. Church Racism

"In the reaction which followed the end of the Revolutionary War, Negroes were discouraged from worshipping at churches with white congregations. One Sunday in November 1787, Richard Allen and several of his friends rebelled against the increasing restrictions of segregation that were imposed upon their right to worship in St. George's, one of Philadelphia's leading Methodist churches. Richard Allen led an exodus of Negroes from the church and set about organizing a new denomination --the African Methodist Episcopal Church."(GREAT NEGROES PAST AND PRESENT, Russell L. Adams)

More than 200 years later, Rev. George A Stallings Jr., a Catholic priest in Washington, D.C., stands in the midst of controversy, having established the Imani Temple in an effort to make Catholicism more liturgically and evangelistically relevant to and in tune with African folks in America. His establishment of the Imani Temple under his pastorship has resulted in Stallings' suspension by Cardinal James A. Hickey.

As was Richard Allen, George Stallings is in a battle against racism. But while Allen and his followers were faced with overt church segregation, Stallings and his parishioners are confronted by a stubborn Eurocentric liturgical and evangelistic tradition which does not respect the African, or African-American, spiritual heritage. While the evangelical and liturgical tradition of the European, as well as Euro-American, Catholic Church is characterized by a kind of cerebral solemnity, the African and African-American religious heritage is marked by "soul," as exemplified by the spirit possessions of traditional African religious services, the emotionally and psychologically-charged testifying of American-born African worshippers in the Baptist churches in the southern U.S., and the vigorous call-and-response char-

acterizing African religious services around the world.

It is this "soul"(inclusive of authentically African rituals) which Stallings is incorporating into his services and which he believes African Catholics in this country have a right to express. In a recent WASHINGTON POST article, Colman McCarthy writes, "It is said that in front of his congregation at Sunday mass, Stallings can preach, sing, swing and jive with such holy verve that even the sanctuary statues get jumping for joy. Or at least the ushers." Rev. Stallings has stated that he wants the establishment of an African-American rite within the Roman Catholic Church, just as there are already Melkite, Tridentine, Byzantine, and Maronite rites.

The controversy surrounding Stallings, replete with the use by the Caucasian Church hierarchy and the press of various American-born African priests and bishops in their attacks against this "disobedient" priest, has raised a number of issues but generally has not provided us with any kind of historical view of the relationship between the Catholic Church and African people. The controversy has not let us in on some fairly well-kept secrets. Most of us are unaware, for example, of the fact that the Catholic Church was first established as a state religion, not in Rome, but in Ethiopia in approximately 333 A.D. by King Ezana, a member of the Solomonian line of Ethiopian monarchs. This was at a time when most of Europe was still pagan.

Nor is it widely known that three of the most important "Fathers of the Church" were Africans: Tertullian, Cyprian, and St. Augustine. Tertullian, who was born in Carthage in 155 A.D., is recognized as one of the Church's most outstanding scholars in rhetoric, Latin, and Greek and is credited with making Latin the Church's official language. Cyprian, who was born in Carthage also, in

249 A.D., became a bishop of Carthage and an early Church martyr. He was beheaded during a period of persecutions of Christians at the hands of the Roman Empire. St. Augustine was born in Numidia in 354 A.D. He is recognized as one of the Church's great scholars and philosophers of all time. His major scholarly works include: CONFESSIONS, ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES, and HOLY CITY OF GOD, etc.

In addition to these early Church scholars, there were at least three African popes: Victor(186-197 A.D.), Miltiades(311-314 A.D.), and St. Gelasius (492-496 A.D.).

But it was not only these and other Africans who influenced the early Catholic Church. We need also be mindful of the fact that the Bible, upon which many of the Church's beliefs and teachings are based, drew heavily from THE BOOK OF COMING FORTH BY DAY AND NIGHT and other ancient Egyptian writings; that Moses(whose birthplace is generally given as Succoth, Egypt) and practically all other important Biblical figures were either African, Afro-Asian, or Asian; and that Jesus, according to the Aquarian Gospel, spent time in Egypt learning "the mysteries."

The history of the relationship between the Catholic Church and African people is not only a history of African influences on that church but also a history of European arrogance and simple racism. Let us consider the matter of the identity of Jesus and the Church's altering of that identity. We are told by the Book of Exodus and Matthew that there is no evidence of any Europeans in Jesus' family line. And there is much Biblical evidence of Jesus' identity as an African or Afro-Asian. Consider, for instance, Chapter II, verses 13-15 of Matthew, which tells us of Joseph and Mary taking their son, Jesus, to Egypt in order to prevent his murder by Herod, who had vowed to kill this boy who would become "the Messiah." Dr. Yosef

ben-Jochannan, in his BLACK MAN'S RELIGION, poses the question of why a Caucasian, or Caucasian-looking, "holy family" would go to Egypt to hide from the forces of Herod. He reminds us that the Greek historian, Herodotus, had described the Egyptians as having black skin and wooly hair and that a wealth of physical evidence points to the typically Africanoid features of the Egyptian population in early times. A person hiding from an enemy goes to live among those whom he or she looks most like, not among those from whom he or she would stick out like the veritable "sore thumb." Moreover, icons of Jesus and the "holy family" in the early Church commonly portrayed Jesus and his parents as having African characteristics. Many of these icons still exist throughout Europe.

So how is it that Catholic and other Christian churches throughout much of the world today portray Jesus and his parents as being Caucasian? Do Church officials in Rome have very faulty memories? No, it is not a matter of faulty memories but a matter of the Church's decision (through the conference of bishops in Nice, France in 322-325 A.D.) to declare that Jesus was God, part of a divine trinity, and the inclination on the part of the Roman-based Church to transform a Jesus-as-God into an entity who looked less and less African and more and more European. Once the Church had turned Jesus into God, it couldn't have him looking unlike those who saw themselves as being the Church authority, the Church itself. And when Michaelangelo, under the commission of Pope Julius II in the 16th century, painted the "holy family" in the Sistene Chapel in Rome, it was members of his own family whom he used as models. And though this act, and other renderings of Jesus and/or the "holy family" as Caucasians, may not have been racist in itself, the usefulness of the Europeanizing of the "God-man" to racists is obvious.

It was during this same period that Bishop Barto-

(Continued on p. 14)

FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization(parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.), is a pan-Africanist newsletter. The FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people, events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any distinction between African people based solely on place of birth. References in the FLAME to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter "black" or other terms used to designate African people. This is our practice because we do not wish to diminish the integrity and authenticity of the articles we excerpt from.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor, Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa(aka David Rice).

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words, though longer pieces will not be automatically rejected. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. We are looking for poems which address African folks' lives, the conditions we face, and our struggles to rise above those things which hinder us. We are not looking for poems which sacrifice power and beauty for the sake of uniform rhythm and/or rhyme. Send submissions to the editor c/o HARAMBEE FLAME; P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, NE; 68502-0500.

From Other Sources

African Farm-City Link-Up Established By United

We Stand Program

"...Called the United We Stand Food Program, the church-based organizations seek to provide Black farmers with alternative markets as well as educate inner-city Blacks of the importance of farming and holding on to the farm land...

"The program(in Chicago) will operate similar to the popular farmers' markets. The United We Stand Program will enter into contracts with Black farmers for produce, hire truckers to deliver the produce to inner-city drop off points, and allow member organizations(not necessarily church groups) to buy from the drop off point and resell it to the Black consumer.

"...The goal, he(Rev. Al Sampson, who is spearheading the Chicago effort) said, is to provide quality food at a cheaper price.

"The United We Stand program consumated in November 1988 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with a shipment of 30,000 pounds of greens and sweet potatoes which sold out in a day, according to founder Clay Hammonds. Chicago and New Orleans are the first of many cities Hammonds hopes will join onto the program in an effort to save Black farms..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Black Farmers Fighting For Survival," which appears on pages 1 and 5 of the June 30 THE FINAL CALL(Chicago, Ill.).

African Public Defender For Cook County Addresses

Issues Of Racism, Court System, And Drugs

"As Cook County Public Defender, he(Randolph Stone) has intimate knowledge of what some blacks derisively call the 'just us' system. He's also convinced that new methods must be used to solve the current crisis in the system, including the problem of racial imbalance...

"'The defendant will probably be brought to the court by a white male law enforcement officer. When he enters the courtroom he will probably see a white judge, a white clerk and a white court reporter.

"'The odds are that the prosecutor and the public defender will be white', he notes. 'The journalists will probably be white. If there's a jury trial the jury will most likely be white also. The victim is probably an African-American. So we have a black victim and defendant being processed, tried and sentenced by mainly white court personnel'.

"But those stark racial imbalances in the criminal justice system mean little to a community overwhelmed by crime. Too many African-American neighborhoods have been transformed into wastelands by criminal activity and, rather than protest the racial disparities in the system, the embattled residents are clamoring for more effective white protection.

"Stone says that while he fully understands this reaction, he believes it is misplaced. 'The cry from within our own community to lock up our own youth ignores the root of the problem and only encourages the hysteria', he contends. Stone argues that locking up increasing numbers of African-American youth will not put a significant dent in the crime problem, but will cause considerable damage to the African-American future...

"Stone says that when talking to kids about drug selling, he's struck by the fact that, after being

abandoned by the public school system, they see no other economic alternative. 'Would we rather that they and their families be homeless'? he asks. 'It's tragic how we have set up a social system that virtually handcuffs a whole class of people to the underground economy and then arrests and incarcerates them for making a living in that economy'..."

-Above passages excerpted from "The 'Just Us' System Is An Offense To A Defender," which appears on page 8 of the July 5-18 IN THESE TIMES(Chicago, Ill).

Tallahassee, Florida Contract With Israeli Firm Under Fire By Anti-Apartheid Group

"Anti-aparheid activists in Tallahassee, Florida are cahllenging a multimillion-dollar city contract with the Israel-based company Tadiran. They charge that Tadiran's connections with South Africa violate a city ordinance barring contracts with companies doing business with the apartheid regime.

"Tadiran, an Israeli electronics company specializing in military hardware, is setting up shop in Tallahassee to build jam-proof combat radios for the U.S. Army as part of a joint venture with General Dynamics. Tallahassee is giving $4 million in tax subsidies to Tadiran, which will occupy two facilities and pay only $1 a year in rent for the next ten years. Local businesses and civic organizations contributed to a $725,000 bond that General Dynamics demanded before locating in Tallahassee.

"Dr. Edward Holifield, a veteran civil rights activist and a member of the Florida Rainbow Coalition's Anti-apartheid Task Force, presented evi-

dence to the City Commission and the Tallahassee Democrat newspaper(a contributor to the $725,000 bond) linking Tadiran and its parent company Koor to South Africa.

"Koor, a conglomerate controlling more than a score of companies, is Israel's largest private employer and is owned and operated by the Israeli Labor Federation, Histadrut. Holifield presented pages from Johannesburg telephone directories for 1984-85 and 1987-88 showing listings for Tadiran, as well as documentation of Koor's 51% ownership in Iskoor, an Israeli-South African joint venture. Until July 1988, Iskoor was partly owned by South African government's Iron and Steel Corporation, Iscor. Iscor's ownership was subsequently 'transferred' to an international, South African holding company, Asoma, to avoid the appearance of Israeli -South African cooperation...

"Holifield conducted an extensive inveetigation of Tadiran, and discovered that Tadiran participated in the Israeli effort a decade ago to help South Africa set up a military electronics industry...

"Holifield...points out that Tadiran has provided no documentation regarding its alleged pullout from South Africa and has given four different dates of this pullout...

"On June 5, the IRRC(Investor Responsibility Research Center), which provides services for private institutions that want to avoid doing business with South Africa, gave Meltzer(Gurim Meltzer, Koor's vice president) a deadline to respond to IRRC's proposed listing of the Koor Industries, including Tadiran, in its July 1989 update of companies investing in South Africa. If IRRC includes Koor in its update, it will be the first time an Israeli company has been so listed..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Activists Ques-

tion City Contract With Israeli Firm," which appears on page 9 of the July 5 THE GUARDIAN (N.Y., N.Y.).

Film-making: From African To Pan-African

"...Fespaco, the Festival of Pan African Cinema In Ouagadougou, is held every other year in the capital of Burkina Faso. Dedicated to the exhibition, promotion and development of African film, this festival attracts thousands of people starved for a realistic contemporary vision of African cinema which both documents and celebrates African life...

"...The remarkable growth of Fespaco is due not only to the filmmakers' passion and vision, but equally to a national commitment on the part of the African governments who encourage this vision through concrete support in the forms of money, promotion, and policymaking. Nowhere has this support been more evident than in Burkina Faso, particularly during the reign of President Thomas Sankara(1983-87)...

"...It was Sankara's influence which helped to transform Howard University film professor and filmmaker Halie Germina's dream of including Africans from the diaspora as an integral part of Fespaco...

"Sankara challenged African-Americans to support Black film by aggressively making more politically and socially conscious films, and entering them in Fespaco; a challenge which is partially being answered through the organization called the Federation of Film and Videographers of the African Diaspora(FFVAD).

"...there have been at least four co-productions between Africans on the continent and African Americans."

-Above passages esxcerpted from "Continent Fes-

tival: Is Images Of Africa," which appears on page 3B of the June 29 COLUMBUS CALL AND POST.

Possible Cure For Diabetes Found In Ghana

"...The Centre for Scientific Research into Plant Medicines(CSRPM), at Mampong, in the Eastern Region of Ghana, is establishing the effectiveness of local herbs and to determine safe dosages...

"Researchers at the CSRPM...say they have discovered a cure for diabetes, a claim supported by the Medical School of the University of Science and Technology, and Okomfo Anokye Teaching Hospital, Kumasi, where 75 per cent of one doctor's patients are said to have recovered completely after receiving treatment.

"But the CRSPM has not been able to acquire facilities for large-scale drying and extraction of the herb, nor those for packaging, tablet making, and capsule filling, in spite of the high interest shown in the cure by pharmacologists from Europe, China and the U.S.

-Above passages excerpted from "Herbs To The Rescue," which appears on pages 1086 and 1087 of the July 3-9 WEST AFRICA(London, England).

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Efforts Made In Africa To Address Food Production Problems

"The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation(FAO) and

the European Space Agency(ESA) have signed an agreement putting satellite information at the disposition of the FAO, to assist in the fight against locust infestation and to aid the monitoring of harvests. The FAO will benefit from the ESA's Diana System, with use of three ground stations plus a central station installed at the FAO headquarters in Rome. The agreement came in the same week that 66 specialists attended an international conference in Niamey, convened by the Sahel Club (of donors) and the Interstate Committee to Combat Drought in the Sahel(CILSS), to study the potential of satellite teledetection in the area...

"In another development of importance to food production in Africa, Dr. Machivenyika Mapuranga, Assistant Secretary General of the OAU, has opened Rhone-Poulenc's new trypanocide plant in Essex, England. The 3m plant will manufacture active ingredients for...drugs used against trypanosomiasis, the sleeping sickness affecting livestock and carried by parasites and affecting nearly 40 per cent of Africa."

-Above passages excerpted from "Foodstuffs," which appears on page 1142 of the July 10-16 WEST AFRICA(London, England).

Autonomy For Africans In Nicaragua

"...Isolated for centuries in the Bluefields area by geographical and historical circumstances, black Nicaraguans(known as Creoles) now find themselves in the middle of an important social experiment. This is the region's autonomy project, an effort considered vital for the future of the Nicaraguan revolution...

"...the black Nicaraguan population, though small, has played a significant part over the centuries on the Atlantic Coast and, as the most educated and urbanized people in the region, is playing a significant role in the autonomy process...

"On a per capita basis the revolution invested more in the Atlantic Coast than anywhere else in the country. In 1980 the literacy campaign was supplied with texts in Miskito and English. Many economic development projects were started--a deep-water port at El Bluff, a new lumber mill, cultivation of new cash crops, roads, hospitals and the like...

"...the new government ministries were mainly staffed by officials from Managua who were considered more plitically reliable than local people.

"When the Sandinistas came to recognize that they had ignored the black community's desire for self-rule and cultural expression, the government gave more of the important jobs in the Bluefields ministries to blacks. A regional Autonomy Commission headed by a local black activist has played a prominent role in local politics.

"The autonomy law calls for the formation of two regional governments. One is to be in the north, centered around Puerto Cabezas, where the Miskitos will be a majority. The other will be in the south around Bluefields, with a black majority. Eachautonomous government will be composed of an elected assembly of 45 members, which will choose a governor for the region. This election will coincide with the national elections set for this coming February."

-Above passages excerpted from "Hard Road To Self-Determination For Coast's Black Community," which appears on page 9 of the July 19 THE GUARDIAN(N.Y., N.Y.).

lome de LasCasas(1474-1566 A.D.) secured from Pope Clement VII and King Charles I of Spain endorsement of the inauguration of chattel slavery. Furthermore, throughout the period of the Atlantic slave trade, up to and including the period of European colonialization of Africa, bishops and missionary priests of the Catholic Church, as well as their Protestant brethren, were notorious for their collusion with European governments and trading companies in the rape of Africa.

So the racism that Rev. Stallings is callenging is not a new feature of the Catholic Church. But we must hope that his Imani(Swahili for "faith") Temple will go beyond an objective of establishing an African and/or African-American worshipping style. For the Temple to truly be Afrocentric in this day and time, it must become an instigating force, moving the Sisters and Brothers it serves to rise up from self-loathing, cowardice, self-imposed powerlessness, complacency, and the other mental psychological shackles by which we are restrained from pushing the stone away from our collective tomb.

.....

We have been making efforts to get a phone number or address for Brother Stallings. It is our hope to be able to conduct an interview with him for the September edition of the FLAME.

Back In Time

"The missionaries began their work on kings and notables...First of all, to become a Christian one had to be baptized and given a 'Christian' name. Christian names were Western names, and they all took the form used in the conquering country. The first Kongolese king to become a Christian was Nzinga Kuwu in 1492, taking the Portuguese name of Joao I. Hundreds of other Blacks immediately followed his example--princes, chiefs, ministers and some of the masses...Overbearing Jesuit Fathers were installed as councilors to the king, one functioning as a prime minister. This move at once destroyed the troublesome traditional council that controlled chiefs and kings, and with such councils no European power could operate. The age of absolutism with the rise of the nation-state in Europe was directly reflected in the Kongo kingdom. With this Portuguese wedge between the king and the people, the Kongo rulers now found themselves free to make important decisions without reference to Black councilors. They therefore tended to become absolute monarchs insofar as their own people were concerned, but generally puppets in the hands of Europeans...The idea of divine kingship was promoted through the anointment and crowning of kings by Portuguese bishops. Kings now ruled as 'sons of the Church', chosen by divine decree to serve it..."

-from THE DESTRUCTION OF BLACK CIVILIZATION by Chancellor Williams

Announcements

"We would like to have your thinking on some problems facing America,--the deficit, the trade imbalance, racism, the situations in the Middle East, South Africa, South America, etc. Some problems are more complex than others. For example, how much does the ractice of racism in America affect America's practice of international politics? Let us have your 800 to 2,000 word esay on any aspect of problems facing America. 1st prize, $100; two 2nd prizes, $50; four 3rd prizes, $25. Deadline: August 15, 1989. Send submissions to: Essay Contest/AIM QUARTERLY; C.O. Box 20554; Chicago, ILL; 60619."

"K.A. Publications introduces AFRICA-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORY, which explores the implications of an Africa-centered perspective on concept formation in the social sciences, African-American history and South African history. Dr. C. Tsehloane(author) is a senior faculty member in the Department of African American Studies at Temple University and is Director and Series Editor of the Department's Institute of African and African-American Affairs." For ordering and other information, write to: K.A. Publications; P.O. Box 278; Blackwood, N.J.; 08012.

Autopsy

five-pointed skulls on a field of blue

razor-edged lines in bone white

and blood red

running long as rows of cotton

as forced marches from tribal lands

to reservations

a cloth haunted

by the ghosts of dred scott

chief joseph

emmet till

and others whose spirits do not lie still

but wail

in the night of this seamless weave.

Mondo